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Senate

The Senate met at 12:09 p.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. STEVENS).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal Spirit, thank You for Your steadfast love and Your unchanging mercy. Your wondrous deeds sustain us and Your compassion keeps us secure. Thank You for traveling mercies and for the shield of Your protection during the conventions. Remind us that true greatness comes through service. May we esteem others as better than ourselves.

Bless our lawmakers today. Strengthen them in their challenging work of striving to find common ground. Protect them from strife and division as they seek unity for the good of our Nation and world.

In a special way, comfort those who mourn in Russia and help those who face the challenges of nature in Florida. We pray also for the speedy and complete recovery of President Clinton. Lord, we treasure each other as these situations remind us of the fragility of life. Empower us all to trust You without wavering. We pray this in Your holy Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The PRESIDENT pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, first, let me welcome everybody back from what

I hope was a safe and productive August break. It seems as if only a few days ago we were here on the floor finishing our work prior to our recess. Since that time, we have had the two party conventions, and our colleagues have been spending time with their constituents and with family and friends.

Today, we will resume our Senate business with a period of morning business to allow Senators to make statements and to introduce legislation. A number of colleagues have expressed their desire to come to the floor, and we will coordinate an informal schedule of speakers over the course of this afternoon.

Under the consent agreement reached prior to the recess, at 5 p.m. today we will proceed to executive session for debate on two district court nominations. Those nominations are Virginia Maria Hernandez Covington, of Florida, to be a U.S. district judge for the Middle District of Florida, and Michael Schneider, of Texas, to be a U.S. district judge for the Eastern District of Texas. The Senate will vote on the confirmation of those judicial nominations at 5:30 today, and those will be the first votes of the day.

Following those votes, we will consider the nomination of Michael Watson, of Ohio, to be a U.S. district judge for the Southern District of Ohio. I do not anticipate a rollcall vote to be necessary on the Watson nomination; therefore, the two votes at 5:30 today should be the only rollcall votes of the day.

I know there are colleagues who are ready to speak; therefore, I will defer some longer opening comments to about 30 minutes from now. I would say at this time that our plans are to begin consideration of the Homeland Security appropriations bill tomorrow morning. I am discussing with the Democratic leadership an agreement to allow us to move quickly on that legislation. Again, I will have more to say

on the Senate schedule in about 30 or 45 minutes.

With that, Mr. President, I look forward to a productive legislative period.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

COMPLETING THE SENATE'S BUSINESS

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I join my colleague, the majority leader, in welcoming all of our colleagues back, and also our staff and a new class of pages who are starting today. We are pleased they could join us. We know they will be enjoying their experience, and we are delighted they could be here as we begin this important business.

I had the opportunity to talk with Senator FRIST briefly this morning. He and I come to the floor this morning with the realization that, with what limited time is left, we must do what our eloquent Chaplain has just prayed we would do; that is, we find the common ground required to deal with the array of legislative challenges that we face as a Senate body and as a country.

It would be my hope we could do what the majority leader has suggested, which is to begin deliberations on the Homeland Security appropriations bill very early in the session, hopefully as early as tomorrow. I will be discussing this matter and other scheduling issues with our caucus and our leadership tomorrow morning, but I can say, even having not had the benefit of those discussions, there is a great deal of interest in working with our colleagues on the other side of the aisle to achieve completion of the Homeland Security bill, as we have called for now for a couple of months.

We also have, of course, 11 other appropriations bills that have not yet reached completion. Most have not

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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even been considered on the Senate floor. It would be my hope we could devote all of our energy, all of our attention, all of the effort at addressing that need. We are only 3 weeks away from the end of this fiscal year, and clearly a lot of work has to be done if we are going to be able to complete our work on time.

So the appropriations bills, especially the Homeland Security appropriations bill, need our attention. I will say publicly what I have already said privately to the majority leader: that he can count on our cooperation and partnership as we address that bill in particular.

There are also a number of bills in conference. The highway bill ought to be completed this month. The FSC bill, the foreign sales credit bill, the Energy bill, the Defense bill—all of those bills need attention, need completion. So we have a lot of work to do.

It would certainly be my hope our Republican colleagues would send the right message not only to all of us on this side of the aisle but to the country about their determination to put those priorities first. We can always score cheap political points, but I hope we would resist that temptation on both sides of the aisle and get on with the work of the Senate and the country in a way that will accomplish this very extraordinarily long list of legislative challenges and needs that we face as we begin our session.

I also note we will be taking up additional judicial nominations, I am sure. The three judges confirmed today will bring the total for this administration to 201, which is the fourth highest number of judges ever confirmed in a single term. I think it goes again to the extraordinary cooperation the administration has received on nominations.

MAKING THE 9/11 COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATIONS LAW

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I will have a lot more to say about nominations in coming days, but I want to focus, if I may, on just one matter that I think deserves real attention this month. I have also discussed this matter with the majority leader. It has to do with the recommendations made by the 9/11 Commission.

On November 27, 2002, when the President signed the law that created the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, he said:

I expect that the Commission's final report will contain important recommendations for steps that can be taken to improve our preparedness for and responses to terrorist attacks in the future.

Twenty months, over 1,000 interviews, 12 public hearings, millions of pages of documents reviewed later, the Commission has put together those important recommendations—41 in all. Few of the recommendations are new. Many are obvious. Yet none are law. The ideas are there. The leadership has

been lacking. It is up to us, with the time we have now, to provide that leadership.

Congress is back in session for less than 2 months. The single most important thing we can do is make the American agenda the Senate's agenda, and we need to put security first. That means putting at the top of our legislative agenda the two items that carry with them an urgency that is unique to our time and our challenges: the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission and the funding necessary to increase homeland security.

The last months have only heightened concerns about the threat of terrorism.

In early August, the Secretary of Homeland Security raised the terror alert level from elevated to high, putting Washington, DC, New York, and New Jersey on orange alert.

Also last month, two airliners crashed nearly simultaneously in an incident that appears to have been caused by midair explosions.

Last week the world witnessed the terrible hostage standoff at a Russian school and the tragic consequences that resulted.

In those last two incidents, other nations were targets. And yet we know that America is a target. The question for every Member of Congress is, have we done enough to improve our Nation's security?

Three high-level government reports all sanctioned by the Bush administration—conclude the answer is: not yet.

The 9/11 Commission is not the first to look at how we can strengthen our intelligence community in order to protect ourselves. In just the past 4 years, the Joint House-Senate inquiry into the September 11 terrorist attacks issued its findings, as did a commission appointed by President Bush and led by General Brent Scowcroft.

Three independent commissions have reviewed these issues, and they have all made remarkably similar recommendations.

They have all said we need a national intelligence director someone whose job it is to manage the national intelligence program and oversee the agencies that make up the intelligence community. Right now, the CIA director also serves as the Director of Central Intelligence. But whoever is in that job simply doesn't have the authority to reposition our intelligence community to face new threats. We know al-Qaida is adapting every day. We are not.

They have all said we need a national Counterterrorism Center, to bring together all sources of information so that we can eliminate the barriers that kept one agency's information from another's and kept all of that information from getting analyzed.

We need to do more to understand and disrupt terrorist finances; improve the FBI's counterterrorism capabilities; and work with our allies to abolish terrorist sanctuaries.

When you have all of these experts saying all of the same things, it would be foolish for us not to listen and dangerous for us not to act.

The 9/11 Commission has made a series of additional recommendations. They include: Securing weapons of mass destruction and keeping them out of the hands of terrorists; using the full array of our power—military, diplomatic, law enforcement, and humanitarian—to combat Islamic extremism; finishing the job in Afghanistan with a long-term commitment to reconstruction and security, so that land never again becomes a haven for terrorists; openly confronting the ongoing Saudi-based terror financing and official tolerance of extremists, and reconfiguring our relationship so that it is not based simply on oil.

Of course, one of their most significant recommendations was for us to do more to protect the homeland. Recent disclosures have demonstrated that al-Qaida is an opportunistic organization. They don't attack where we are well defended. They attack where we aren't.

And so it is vitally important that we make America a harder target, while also preparing for attacks that may take place, so that we can contain the damage and save lives.

The way we do that is through the Homeland Security appropriations bill.

This bill includes the funding necessary to improve border security and customs inspections, to hire 570 new border agents, to make our ports safer by inspecting more shipping containers, and to make America's transportation systems safer.

It also includes funding to protect America against bioterrorism, cyberterrorism and to ensure our first responders have the tools and training they need in case they are called upon to respond to an attack.

Right now, we face a test of seriousness.

The September 11 Commission has made 41 recommendations. One of them can be addressed by completing work on the Homeland Security appropriations bill. But we need to act on all of them. As Lee Hamilton has said:

We believe that the reforms are a package and that if some are broken off, then the result is that you diminish the impact of our recommendations . . . You end up with something of less value.

We need to put security first. I don't think the Senate should be allowed to leave town until we have acted on all 41 of these recommendations.

Certainly, there will be some disagreement on some. I know that others have suggested different approaches and different reforms entirely.

All of these things deserve debate and discussion. But debate and discussion are meaningless if the 9/11 Commission's recommendations don't also receive action.

Time is of the essence.

Every day the Congress spends not doing the 9/11 recommendations is a day we ignore the threat and neglect our most solemn duty as leaders.